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GOD'S COVENANT IN THE PROPHETS.

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The criticism of Baur refers the specific character of the Christian religion more to Paul than to Christ. By the latest critical school the human author of the Old Testament religion is made a very insignificant person. Its real authors, the path-finders, the representatives of its most essential and fundamental thoughts, are claimed to be the later prophets of the Northern Kingdom.

In Wellhausen's writings we have almost nothing of Moses and his work. [Compare the judgment of L. von Ranke, *Universal History* I., i. p. 42: "Moses is the most exalted personage of the early history. The thought of the extra mundane and intellectual God was grasped by him and embodied in the people he led"]. According to Kuenen his real work was this, he made a firm alliance between Jehovah and the people he led out of Egypt. Not in what Moses appointed for divine worship or the civil life lies his importance. The great thing is his establishment of *moral* reverence for the God of the fathers whose new name was revealed to Moses. "I will be your God and ye shall be my people:" this he brought to the national consciousness, and this is the summary of his life-work. This consciousness the people retained, while all else, and especially the moral conception of God, they could not grasp. "In a word," says Kuenen, "that which distinguished Moses from his people, was restricted to himself and to individual spirits akin to his. Under the influence of Moses, Israel took a step forward, but it was only *one* step."

With true tact Wellhausen feels the vital importance of the covenant. If a covenant with definite conditions was actually concluded with the people under Moses, if the knowledge of such a covenant began with the national life, the ground is shaken beneath his historical structure. Hence he denies that the idea of a covenant between Jehovah and his people is to be found in the prophets. Thus, of necessity, we shall be led into an examination of the conception of the *berith* and its significance in the prophetic literature. We have to enquire whether the earlier prophets recognize the Mosaic covenant as the basis of their own message or not, and also what construction they give to that covenant.

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Berith (from *barah* = to cut, separate) has been explained as determination, establishment. Then a derivative sense is a settlement made between individuals, and regulating their mutual relation. We cannot agree with this. The original import is not *diatheke* a putting apart (in its primitive sense, *monopleuros*, one-sided) but *syntheke* a putting together. Thus *berith* comes from the mutuality (compare Delitzsch *On Hebrews*: also same writer *On Job*, XXXI., 1). This is proved by the frequent construction with the prepositions *with* and *between*. The conception *diatheke*, usually distinguished by the construction with *le*, sets out from the fact that every covenant includes individual stipulations. To that is added the special nature of this covenant, in which God as a superior proffers and imposes the obligations without which no covenant can be thought of. Hence also there is little said of Jehovah's performance of the covenant. His faithfulness makes it certain that he will keep his pledges, and the other party only needs admonition. Doubtless the customary form *karah berith* corresponding to the parallel expressions Gr. *horkia temnein*, Lat. *foedus icere*, shows that the first and oldest sense of *berith* is a covenant confirmed by sacrifices. And this primary meaning still appears in *berith* which is precisely *cutting in pieces* [see Koehler on Zechariah IX., 11.]

It lies in the conception of a covenant that it constitutes a legal relation bringing with it obligations and rights for the parties. Jehovah pledges himself to be a faithful covenant God to his people, and in return demands their obedience. It is for this that in the prophets Jehovah so often appears remonstrating and reasoning with his people. Israel on the other hand may expect the fulfilment of the divine promises in case the people keep the covenant pledges. The question arises whether with these covenant pledges was united the element of public worship. Everywhere in the olden time covenant and sacrifice are kept close together. Not merely the usual form *karah berith* and the derivation of *berith*, but also Gen. XV., and especially the account in Exod. XXIV., demonstrate that the same is true of Israel. The oldest account of the Mosaic covenant represents it as confirmed by sacrifices, the book of the covenant includes the sacrifice as the binding force; there can be no doubt that the Mosaic covenant is most closely connected with sacrifice. It is therefore readily understood that Wellhausen seeks to eliminate the idea of the covenant from the earlier prophetic literature. But that is a battle with windmills. "The knowledge," says Kuenen, "that a new and peculiar relation existed between the God in whose name Moses appeared and the tribes of Israel, this knowledge never died out." So, indeed, we find

it. All the prophets base their messages on the condition of things ordained by Moses at Sinai. In the "blessing of Moses" it is appointed as the chief duty of the priesthood to keep God's covenant with his people (Deut. XXXIII., 9). And the "blessing of Moses" as well as the song of Deborah (Judg. v.) begins with a reference to the manifestation of God upon Sinai. Instead of looking at this Wellhausen holds that the narrative in Ex. XXIV., 3-8 seems to have remained without influence upon the older prophets. Strange, how little he is concerned for the latent character of the book of the covenant to whose environment the account in Ex. XXIV. belongs, while he presents the similar character of the Priest Codex as most improbable. But grant even that the book of the Covenant with its historic environment and the "blessing of Moses" were unknown to the older prophets, or not recognized by them, an assumption in the highest degree unlikely, do we not find the same idea in these prophets? If in Amos the name chance to be wanting, is not the fact there? Am. III., 1: "Hear this word that the Lord hath spoken against you, O children of Israel, against the whole family which I brought up from the land of Egypt, saying, you only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities" (the prophet plainly has Ex. XIX., 5 in view). The inference is easy and unavoidable that Amos has knowledge of a close relation between Jehovah and Israel, a covenant whose violation he makes the occasion for the divine punishment. Hosea compares the relation between Jehovah and his people to a marriage. Again he puts the thing itself in place of the symbol Hos. VIII., 1 and VI., 7. Does he not know the idea of the covenant? To his view in VIII., 1 the entire guilt of the people is comprised in the transgression of the covenant. And when according to Isaiah, Jehovah is king or father or lord of the vineyard, these figures are only paraphrases of the same covenant relation. The king loves and protects his people, the father his children, the vine-dresser his vineyard, so long as they perform what he is entitled to claim, but otherwise dissolves his relations to them and visits them with judgment and penalty. It is not that the word was the source of the idea, as Wellhausen thinks. The very opposite is true, the idea is clothed not in a word alone, but in varied and popular symbols.

Just in the all-controlling idea of the covenant is involved the truth of what Duhm observes, that to the old prophets Israel as a people is the object of their preaching. Yet it is too narrow a view to deny entirely the reference to individuals. At all events the covenant is to be regarded in the first place as a covenant of the whole people. In fact, upon unprejudiced examination there is no difference

between earlier and later prophets in their understanding of the covenant. Indeed the stability of the Old Testament ideas is much greater than some would have us believe. Guthe's remark is correct, that all the forces of Jeremiah's preaching meet in the idea of the covenant and that the idea is most prominent in this prophet. But if his whole ministry is embraced in the *berith*, it is only because the significance of that idea is so central, not only "with the authorities on biblical theology," but in the Old Testament religion itself. And in principle the same is true of the older prophets. Jeremiah never uses *berith* metaphorically (of a covenant with beasts, stones, as in Hos. II., 20; Job V., 23 or with death, Is. XXVIII., 15). He never uses it except in a distinct religious sense. From this fact some draw the conclusion that Jeremiah was the first to confine the covenant to the purely religious domain and therefore that he has an idea of the covenant peculiar to himself. This is too external a treatment. Why could he not make use of the idea that was so current, as in Zech. XI., 10 or Mal. II., 14? Wellhausen makes the same mistake, when from the covenant with the beasts, Hosea II., 20, he infers the absence of the specific idea of the covenant from Hosea. With such precarious proofs this one fact cannot be disproved: all the prophets take their stand upon the covenant established through Moses. Or is it true that to these prophets the covenant relation is something not negotiated through Moses? It might certainly seem singular that the name of Moses occurs so little in the older prophets. But why need one say what is known by all? The argument "from silence," which plays so important a part in the latest criticism, often proves merely mechanical. Amos mentions the special choice of Israel to a peculiar relation with God and connects this choice with the leading out from Egypt (Am. III., 1.) Yet he does not make merely the leading out from Egypt by Moses the obligation—for Ethiopia, Syria and Philistia have also been led (Am. IX., 7).

Besides this the prophet must know other works done in the very beginning of the nation's history and by the same agent. But when Hosea (XII., 13) compares Moses with Jacob, is it not as a prophet only that Moses appears? "And Jacob fled into the country of Syria, and Israel served for a wife, and for a wife he kept sheep. And by a prophet the Lord brought Israel out of Egypt; and by a prophet was he preserved."

The contrast is plain: while Ephraim boasts of Jacob and Bethel, he forgets the greater person by whom God has led him out of Egypt and preserved him. Is a prophet more exalted than a serving shepherd? So much higher stands Moses than the poor, lowly Jacob keep-

ing sheep for a wife. It is urged (Ewald) that this historical review is to show God's wondrous protecting care in dangers. Of Jacob no deliverance from danger is here recorded, but with Jacob's poor shepherd-life is contrasted the grand prophetic office of Moses. One kept flocks for a wife and the other kept the people.

That Ephraim has provoked bitter anger is so much the worse (v. 15); he has spoken trembling and sedition, exalted himself in Israel (XIII., 1), and continued this from the very beginning to the present. It will be seen how groundless is the talk about Hosea's laying the first foundations of Israel's religion. To the prophet Ephraim's sin is an apostasy from the Mosaic past. For this relation is clearly present in his thought. The Mosaic time is the time of the first young love (Hos. XI., 1). Thus are the older prophets based entirely upon the covenant concluded by Moses. Amos v., 26 does not teach that Israel's religion was developed from an originally Sabæan form.

The prophets appear everywhere and entirely, not as preaching new doctrines. They do not present arguments that the people should comply with their requirements in religion and morals; they presume that the sin of the people is an offence against old and long known truths. They live and move in the covenant; they charge the people with breaking the covenant. And in this understanding the people are agreed with the prophets. One thing every child in Israel knows, that God, through Moses, has put himself in a covenant relation to the people. Smend's remark is fully sustained: "That a covenant was once established on Mt. Sinai through Moses, was evident from the certain and unanimous tradition of antiquity."